



**PRESS RELEASE
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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
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Franklin County, PA Part of Unprecedented National Summit Focused on Ways to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illness in Jails

CHAMBERSBURG, PA - April 27, 2016 - A team of criminal justice and behavioral health professionals from Franklin County attended a two-day summit this week that brought together 50 select teams from U.S. communities of all sizes as part of a national initiative to address the mental health crisis in our nation's jails.

[The Stepping Up Summit](#), which convened jail administrators, law enforcement officials, county elected officials, psychiatrists and other stakeholders from jurisdictions across the country, was designed to give attendees a clear understanding of what constitutes a comprehensive, system-level plan that, when implemented, will reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jail.

The team from Franklin County consisted of Commissioner Bob Thomas, District Attorney Matt Fogal, Warden Bill Bechtold, Probation Chief Dan Hoover, and Mental Health Administrator Steve Nevada.

D.A. Fogal said of the Summit, "It was refreshing to meet folks from all over the nation and learn that what we are doing here in Franklin County is already better than many other jurisdictions. Here, we continue to lean forward and identify issues immediately, and certainly before we encounter an untenable situation we are unprepared to deal with. As an example, a great many of our police officers in Franklin County have already been trained in Crisis Intervention techniques in dealing with offenders with mental illness, and I have been one of the instructors in that type of training for over two years."

Indeed, Franklin County's leadership in addressing cross systems issues earned it a spot at the selective Summit, and workshop facilitation roles for two of its team members. The 50

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jurisdictions selected to attend consist of a cross-section of urban, suburban and rural counties representing 37 states. Each team includes local policymakers and stakeholders prepared to enhance efforts and take action to address this national crisis.

At the two-day summit, county teams took stock of work already underway in their counties in order to chart a path forward. To that end, attendees considered [six questions related to the commitment of local leadership, use of screening and assessments, the level of baseline data that currently exists, tracking progress and other items.](#)

Stepping Up was [launched in May 2015](#) as a partnership of [The Council of State Governments Justice Center](#), [The National Association of Counties \(NACo\)](#), and [The American Psychiatric Association Foundation](#). The initiative is designed to rally national, state, and local leaders around the goal of achieving an actual reduction in the number of people with mental illnesses and substance use disorders in jail. Over the past year, more than 250 counties, representing nearly 30 percent of the U.S. population, have passed resolutions to advance the goals of Stepping Up. Many communities have already taken action to address the crisis locally, and many in the medical community have put its weight behind collaborating to effect change.

Despite the passionate commitments and efforts of many communities to make an impact, county leaders report there are more people with mental illnesses in jails than ever before. According to research published in the journal *Psychiatric Services*, the number of people with mental illnesses in jails is three to six times higher than that of the general public.

As a result, local budgets are strained by jails spending two to three times more on people with mental illnesses than they do on people without those needs. The exorbitant cost to taxpayers to arrest, adjudicate, segregate, and supervise these individuals is having little-to-no impact in terms of public safety or public health.

Franklin County and other county teams engaged with criminal justice and behavioral health experts, along with fellow county representatives from across the country, to consider the latest research and strategies and learn from the challenges and approaches other jurisdictions have experienced.

Franklin County team members worked on-site to develop and evaluate plans to reduce mental illness in the local jail and walked away with a concrete set of priorities upon which to take action and measure progress on their plans.

Commissioner Thomas, who also serves as the President of the County Commissioners Association of PA and a member of NACo, said, "One of the many issues discussed was the stigma and treatment of the mentally ill. It goes back 2000 years as stated in Luke 8:26-39. Unfortunately, not much has changed. The good news is we in Franklin County are better than much of the country, but that's not to say we do not have room for improvement. I am committed to Step Up for change."

Mr. Nevada, who served as the Team Leader, said, "It was a great Summit, seeing leaders from all over the Country focused on reducing the number of individuals with mental illness in jails. While it was clear that counties throughout the country are experiencing the same challenges we are, it

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was promising and inspiring to see that, in relation to other counties, we are ahead of many in terms of system collaboration to address mental illness and incarceration. We left the Summit with many valuable technical assistance resources to assist us in pursuit of evidence-based practices to address our communities' needs."

Chief Hoover noted, "After listening to all the good programs and strategies being utilized throughout the country, I can see we have a lot of work to do. We have good people working at all levels of County government in Franklin County, and I am confident we can work together to achieve something great."

According to Warden Bechtold, "I was honored to be part of the team from Franklin County and I look forward to working towards reducing the numbers of individuals who suffer from mental illness and become involved in the criminal justice system."

The Stepping Up Summit is made possible through the support of the American Psychiatric Association Foundation, which acknowledges the generous funding from Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson and Johnson, the Elizabeth K. Dollard Charitable Trust, Alkermes, and Otsuka America Pharmaceutical, Inc. The Stepping Up Initiative is also grateful for the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Safety and Justice Challenge.



From Left to Right: Mental Health Administrator Steven Nevada, Probation Chief Daniel Hoover, District Attorney Matt Fogal, Warden William Bechtold, Secretary of Corrections John Wetzel and Commissioner Robert Thomas.

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